

Age Healthier, Breathe Easier

Did you know that environmental hazards can make it harder to breathe? Environmental hazards are dust, fumes or other particles that dirty the air. As people age, they are more likely to develop breathing problems caused by lung diseases. By knowing what can cause or set off an asthma attack or other breathing problems, you may be able to protect yourself and your loved ones.

What in the Environment Can Make it Harder to Breathe?

Breathing problems can occur if you smoke or are around tobacco smoke. Also, breathing dust, fumes, or other outdoor pollutants that make the air dirty can make it hard to breathe. The main types of **outdoor** air pollution that can worsen breathing problems include:

- Particle pollution: Particle pollution comes from car and truck exhaust, emissions from factories, power plants, and construction site dust.
- Ozone: Ozone is a gas created when pollutants from cars, power and chemical plants, and other sources, react chemically with sunlight.

Breathing problems can result from **indoor** air pollution caused by:

- Smoke from tobacco and wood-burning stoves
- Fumes from household cleaning products and products used to kill bugs or rodents
- Other household products that make odors (paints, wax, hobby products and cosmetics, fragrances, and gasoline fumes)
- Dust mites (tiny bugs) and insects
- Pet dander (skin flakes, saliva and urine from animals)
- Mold and dust

How Can You Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones?

- Avoid tobacco smoke and smoke from wood-burning stoves.
- Clean your house to get rid of mold, dust mites, and insects.
- Keep pets out of places where you sleep.
- Check your furnace, heating units, and stove every year for gas leaks, and be sure they are free of mold.
- Clean your humidifier and air conditioner filters to be sure they are free of mold.

- Fix water leaks right away to keep mold from growing and insects away.
- Open a window or door when using strong cleaning products, paint, or bug spray so the fumes will not build up indoors.
- Check the Air Quality Index by visiting www.epa.gov/airnow and follow the advice about staying indoors. Some newspaper, television, and radio weather reports also carry the Air Quality Index.

If you have trouble breathing or think you may have symptoms of lung disease, see a doctor right away. Symptoms include coughing up lots of mucus; feeling short of breath; and having a pain in your chest. You and your health care provider can work out a plan for taking care of your symptoms with medicine and lifestyle changes.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Publication Number EPA-100-F-05-017 (September, 2005).